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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR GENERAL ESPERON'S VISIT TO THE
CHIEFS OF DEFENSE CONFERENCE

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Tim, I know you will have a mountain of excellent briefing paper for the CHOD conference, but I wanted to offer my input on Jun Esperon, who will arrive in Hawaii on Monday. Jun is a strong ally, and he understands the delicate balance that military operations play in the ongoing peace process in Mindanao. His commanders are learning from our forces the value of civil-military operations in conflict areas, and they are ramping up their efforts in that area.

¶2. (C) Jun has been on the job for a little over 15 months, and we expect him to serve through next February, unless he is extended by President Arroyo. I have traveled with him on several occasions recently, including to the inauguration of USAID projects in Jolo. Across the board, he is pushing his commanders to adopt a more nuanced approach in conducting operations in Mindanao, and they continue to rack up successes against high-value targets. He has a good working relationship on defense reform and other issues with Secretary of National Defense Teodoro, who told me recently

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that he does not feel the need to micromanage the military commanders with Jun in charge. One area we where want to continue to encourage Jun on is extrajudicial killings. He has been out front in promoting better training and human rights awareness in the armed forces, but we want him to keep the momentum moving in the right direction.

¶3. (SBU) I was pleased to learn that Jun's wife, Lorna, will be accompanying him on the trip. She is a medical doctor who has done work down in Mindanao with disadvantaged groups, and she has a strong interest in the well-being of Philippine troops. While she is in Hawaii, Lorna will be touring the Tripler Medical Center, and Jun tells me Lorna looks forward to the wives program as well. I know General Esperon's trip will be fruitful and an excellent opportunity to talk to your staff and his colleagues from around the region. We look forward to seeing you next year during Balikatan, Tim, if not sooner!

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KENNEY